

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1-8. (Canceled)

9. (New) A cushioning package containing an article to be packaged comprising:

a cushioning sheet comprising overlapped flexible resin sheets, the cushioning sheet including a group of independent small cells formed in the shape of a strip by heat-sealing and dividing the cushioning sheet, the heat sealing and dividing forming a closed space in each of the small cells, and each of the small cells being capable of inflating when air is filled therein;

an article storage space formed by folding the cushioning sheet along a crease crossing said small cells, the crease being transverse to a longitudinal direction of the small cells;

an article storage opening; and

an article to be packaged,

wherein the article storage space is a space enveloped by the small cells and receiving the article therein, and the article storage opening serves as an entrance portion of the article storage space and is closed by adhesion after the article is disposed in the article storage space through the article storage opening, and

wherein filling of air in the small cells that the crease crosses is performed from one side of an end of each of the small cells during the disposing of the article in the article storage space and the closing of the article storage opening.

10. (New) The cushioning package containing an article to be packaged as in claim 9, wherein outer edges of the folded cushioning sheet, except the crease, are bonded, whereby the

article storage space is sealed to be in a hermetic state where an internal pressure of the space is adjusted, and wherein an adjustment of the internal pressure is performed through the article storage opening by sucking out air in the article storage space or by filling air or an inert gas in the article storage space prior to the closing of the article storage opening.

11. (New) A method of manufacturing a cushioning package containing an article to be packaged, said method comprising the steps of:

using a cushioning sheet made of flexible resin sheets that are placed one on another, heat-sealed and divided into a group of independent small cells in the shape of a strip;

forming an article storage space by folding the cushioning sheet in a direction transverse to a longitudinal direction of the small cells along a crease, the space being enveloped by the small cells, and a side of the cushioning sheet opposite to the crease being open;

disposing an article to be packaged in the article storage space through an article storage opening that serves as an entry portion of the article storage space; and

closing the article storage opening by adhesion while filling air from one side of an end of each of the small cells to inflate the small cells that the crease crosses;

wherein the steps of forming, disposing and closing are performed in the recited order.

12. (New) The method of manufacturing a cushioning package containing an article to be packaged as in claim 11, wherein said cushioning sheet is an elongated sheet moving in a longitudinal direction through each of said processes, said step of forming comprising folding the cushioning sheet in the longitudinal direction and adhering edges of the overlapped cushioning

sheet, except for a portion of the edges that becomes an article storage opening, said step of adhering further comprising the steps of:

providing the folded cushioning sheet with a longitudinal direction seal at the open side along the longitudinal direction; and

forming an air passage in communication with each of the small cells at the open end along the longitudinal direction of the sheet,

said step of disposing comprising moving the article along the longitudinal direction of the cushioning sheet, and placing the article inside the article storage space, and

said step of closing comprising disposing a tip of a nozzle inside the air passage along the longitudinal direction of the cushioning sheet and filling air in each of the small cells via the air passage through the nozzle.

13. (New) An apparatus for manufacturing a cushioning package containing an article to be packaged comprising:

an article storage space forming unit in which a cushioning sheet made of flexible resin sheets that are placed one on another, heat-sealed and divided into a group of independent small cells formed in the shape of a strip, is folded along a crease that crosses the small cells, the crease being transverse to a longitudinal direction of the small cells, whereby an article storage space is formed, the article storage space being enveloped by the small cells, and a side opposite to the crease being open;

a sheet adhering unit that adheres the overlapped cushioning sheets;

an article disposing unit that disposes an article to be packaged in the article storage space;
and

an air-filling unit that fills air from the open side of each of the small cells.

14. (New) The apparatus for manufacturing a cushioning package containing an article to be packaged as in claim 13,

wherein said sheet adhering unit includes a longitudinal-direction seal section for adhering the cushioning sheet in a longitudinal direction, and a width-direction seal section for adhering the cushioning sheet in a width direction, and the longitudinal-direction seal section forms an air passage that communicates with the small cells in the cushioning sheet, and

said air-filling unit includes an air nozzle having an air discharge portion situated at a tip thereof, the air nozzle being disposed inside the air passage, and a reverse-flow prevention member for directing air inside the air passage to the small cells by pressing the air passage, and both the width-direction seal section and the reverse-flow prevention member are disposed on a moving body, the moving body moving along the longitudinal direction of the cushioning sheet depending on the size of the article,

wherein, after the small cells are filled with air discharged from the air nozzle, the moving body moves downstream together with the cushioning sheet that is subsequently adhered by the width-direction seal section to complete the cushioning package containing the article.

15. (New) An apparatus for manufacturing a cushioning package containing an article to be packaged, as in claim 14,

wherein the reverse-flow prevention member is provided at a tip thereof with a recess that conforms in shape to a cross-sectional shape of the air nozzle, and the tip presses the air passage while the recess accepts the air nozzle disposed inside the air passage, whereby the air passage is closed except for a portion where the air nozzle is disposed.

16. (New) The apparatus for manufacturing a cushioning package containing an article to be packaged, as in claim 14 or 15,

wherein the air-filling unit includes an adjusting nozzle, a tip of the adjusting nozzle being disposed in the article storage space, and the adjusting nozzle includes an adjusting mechanism that adjusts an internal pressure of the article storage space, and, in said adjusting mechanism, the adjusting nozzle is inserted into the article storage space through the article storage opening that serves as an entrance portion of the article storage space, whereby the air filling unit is capable of sucking out air in the article storage space or filling air or inert gas in the article storage space.